

February 29, 2016

Senate Bill No. 317 An Act Concerning Dyslexia

This testimony is being submitted for your electronic records. I will be providing oral testimony and will bring the required 35 copies to the hearing.

My name is Elisabeth Herdic and I am the proud parent of a very smart dyslexic and dysgraphic 9 year old. I am in support of Senate Bill No. 317 with an amendment that candidates seeking a remedial reading endorsement complete a graduate level program aligned with evidence-based practices and the IDA knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading. We are from Lebanon, CT.

I have known since Kindergarten that there was something very different about the way my daughter learned and wrote. I am also an ER nurse, and over the past 5 years of trying to work with our school system I am baffled at the difference in how hospitals diagnose and treat, and how schools diagnose and treat. If someone walks into the ER with chest pain, we jump all over their complaints. Within minutes they have an EKG, IV, labs, oxygen, aspirin and nitro. Even if we are not sure if they are having a heart attack, we still do all the tests and treatments to give them the best chance. This is not just for chest pain but for most medical complaints. We strep test sore throats, CT scan abdominal pains and head injuries, and splint questionable x-ray's until there is an orthopedic follow up. When a problem is too big for us to handle we transfer the patient to a hospital that specializes in the patient's need. The difference, I have realized, is that hospitals operate off of specific research based algorithms, and implement policies and procedures that are evidence based. If we don't, we get sued! The school system, in our experience, on the other hand, operates in a very different way. They see all the symptoms and put the smallest intervention into use, and wait to see. In 6 weeks they re-evaluate and then will move another inch when they see it hasn't worked. My daughter wasted 4 years in a wait and see failure of a system.

The thing I find most interesting, is that in these 4 years I have spent time reading books and educating myself with the vast, readily, available dyslexia research. I can't remember one thing my school district offered to do for my daughter without me asking. We had to pursue every bit of her diagnosis and programming. Even when we thought we had a good PPT, and a good plan in place, it would take months to implement! As an example it was recommended for her to have an AT eval and tablet in her neuropsychological eval (3/2015). I was told at that time that there were iPads available. It wasn't until Sept, 2015 that she had her AT eval and January 2016 that she was given a tablet. That is almost a full year! You would think in the meantime the school would provide her with, and teach her to use one of the many I was told were available, but no.

The problem is NOT in knowing what needs to be done to educate these students, there is not a lack of research, if you CHOOSE to look. We have encountered such lack of awareness, mostly from the regular classroom teachers. I have heard of schools trying to send their special ed teachers to training, which is great don't get me wrong, but I feel it is the regular ed teachers who also need more education on dyslexia. They are the ones interacting with the student most of the day, the ones implementing their IEP, and the one that needs to make accommodations for all the other areas of the

day that dyslexia affects. They are the ones to advocate for their student at a PPT. There is so much more than reading and writing that is impacted. The noise level in a class, organization, boundaries and expectation, math facts, reading a clock, copying information, test taking, working in a group, transitioning. Her primary teachers could make all the difference if they just understood what she was going through.

So many inappropriate measures have been taken in my daughter's time at school. I think if the school put as much effort in providing evidence based programming as they have in trying to prove that she would "grow out of" her difficulties, she would not be so far behind. Had there been more awareness and less resistance in first grade, I guarantee she would be further ahead now. From assigning her to a first year teacher despite my objection, to having her change her answers on DRA's to then say she not far enough behind, to using her DRA to deny special ed, to shortening her tests instead of giving extra time, to taking her recess away to make her repeatedly write, to putting her in tier 2 groups that fit the group's needs and not hers, to moving her on from those groups with 60% knowledge of that topic because it was "some improvement", to reprimanding her in front of the class for lack of organization, to a teacher who kept telling me she could "hammer math facts" and such into her, I could go on and on. Her time at school did nothing more than create insurmountable anxiety in my daughter, and a huge level of stress as my husband and I spent hours trying to research, plan and advocate at her PPT's.

So what could you have done to better educate her? **#1.** Train her teachers with the research that already exists. Stop stalling and wasting more precious years for these children. Train their special ed teachers **AND** their regular ed teachers. **#2.** Create a magnet school for children with average to above average intelligence who have language based learning disabilities. There is a magnet school for autistic children, a magnet school for behavioral children, there are even special classroom within some magnet school catering to the needs of autistic children. Why is there nothing for dyslexic children? How can you say that their needs are less important? Is it because her struggles only affect her and not her classroom? Because she doesn't have behavior or social struggles, because you can't "see her disability" you assume she can "fit in"? **#3** Create LLD (language learning disability classrooms) within public schools. Have them lead by special ed teachers qualified to teach dyslexic learners. They must be trained in evidence based standards that are proven to be effective like Wilson, Orton Gillingham, or Lindamood-Bell. Have a low student-teacher ratio and all multi-sensory learning. My daughter does not actually want to learn beside the students you consider her "like peers". She wants to know that she is not the only dyslexic student in her class, and that other smart kids also don't know their 1st grade sight words. She doesn't want to get constantly pulled out of the classes that she likes. She wants a day that can met her needs without altering her curriculum. She is a motivated student who has a natural interest in history and science. Her current classroom makes her feel "foolish". **#4.** Ensure that higher education for educators includes evidence based curriculum in literacy instruction for students with dyslexia, using evidence based curriculum and content, not just a course. IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards For Teachers of Reading should align with the Remedial Reading (102) Endorsement. **#5.** Put into place screening for K and 1st grade to red flag students early, and start giving them appropriate instruction. Don't wait until third and fourth grade when the only way to try to catch a student up is to

pull them out of all the classes they like and succeed in. #6 Have a process so that when students aren't progressing in the program that the school has provided, the district has to place the student in a specialized school without the parent having to pay thousands to go to remediation.

I stand here advocating for change and action for all the students in Connecticut. But as for my own child, I have given up on the Connecticut school system giving her the skills she needs to succeed. I pulled her out of public school and am homeschooling her. In the two months she has been home her anxiety has decreased, her handwriting has improved and she is rediscovering her love of learning. I am working extra hours to pay for Orton Gillingham tutoring and exposing her to every opportunity of hands on learning. She has listened to hours of books on tape and begs for more. I could have gone through the overwhelming process of trying to have her placed in a specialized school, as recommended in her neuropsych eval. But where? The schools in CT are limited and far from us. My family and I were done with the bullying process of PPT'S, and the created plans in these meeting that take months to go into effect. We had a choice: spend thousands on a lawyer trying to get her placed into an appropriate school, or spend thousands on home schooling and private tutoring. We chose the latter. I will not send her back to the public school system in CT with the current state of special ed in relation to dyslexia. There needs to be a change. Thank you for your time.